

Message Text

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PAGE 01 PARIS 21978 01 OF 02 281907Z

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ACTION EUR-08

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P 281857Z JUL 76

FM AMEMBASSY PARIS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3413

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PARIS 21978

LIMDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PGOV, FR

SUBJECT: RUMOR OF CHIRAC RESIGNATION

SUMMARY: CHIRAC'S IMMINENT DEPARTURE IS AGAIN
RUMORED BUT WE BELIEVE GISCARD'S INTEREST IS IN
MAINTAINING HIM AS PRIME MINISTER. END SUMMARY

1. WE HAVE HEARD FROM ONE SOURCE THAT PRIME MINISTER
CHIRAC SUBMITTED HIS LETTER OF RESIGNATION TO GISCARD
ON JULY 26. GISCARD'S RESPONSE WAS TO ASK CHIRAC
TO STAY ON UNTIL A FORMAL REPLY TO THE LETTER OF
RESIGNATION IS PREPARED. OUR SOURCE HAS OFTEN BEEN
WELL INFORMED ON PAST OCCASIONS, BUT WE ARE UNABLE
TO CONFIRM THE SPECIFICS OF THIS PARTICULAR REPORT.
WHAT CAN BE SAID WITH SOME RELIABILITY IS THAT
RELATIONS BETWEEN GISCARD AND CHIRAC, AS WELL AS
BETWEEN THE RI AND ITS CENTRIST ALLIES WITH THE UDR,
HAVE BEEN STRAINED OVER THE PAST COUPLE OF MONTHS.
WHETHER THESE STRAINS HAVE REACHED THE POINT OF CHIRAC
SUBMITTING HIS RESIGNATION WE CANNOT SAY FOR SURE.

2. ACCORDING TO OUR SOURCE, WHAT BROUGHT THINGS TO
A HEAD AND LED TO CHIRAC'S INITIATIVE WAS A RECENT
TENSE MEETING CHIRAC HAD WITH GISCARD AS A RESULT OF
A REPORT GIVEN TO GISCARD ABOUT UNCOMPLIMENTARY
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PAGE 02 PARIS 21978 01 OF 02 281907Z

REMARKS MADE ABOUT HIM BY CHIRAC IN THE COURSE OF A

LUNCHEON WITH UDR MINISTERS. ONE OF THOSE MINISTERS WAS CHRISTIAN PONCELET, SECRETARY OF STATE FOR THE BUDGET, WHO ALLEGEDLY REPORTED CHIRAC'S REMARKS TO GISCARD; THE CANARD ENCHAINE OF JULY 28 ATTRIBUTES THE LEAK TO DEFENSE MINISTER BOURGES. SPECIFICALLY CHIRAC WAS QUOTED AS HAVING SAID THAT "GISCARD WAS GOVERNING LIKE A WOMAN," MEANING THAT HE WAS INDECISIVE AND UNABLE TO FACE REALITIES AND MAKE HARD DECISIONS. OUR SOURCE CONTINUED THAT WHEN CHIRAC WAS CONFRONTED WITH REPETITION OF HIS LUNCHEON REMARKS, HE REACTED AGGRESSIVELY BY SAYING THAT HE DID NOT KNOW THAT FRANCE WAS A POLICE REGIME MANIPULATED BY STOOL PIGEONS AND THAT HE WAS NOT PREPARED TO ACCEPT SUCH STATE OF AFFAIRS.

3. SUBMISSION OF RESIGNATION BY A PRIME MINISTER AND ACCEPTANCE OF IT BY THE PRESIDENT ARE TWO DIFFERENT THINGS. CHIRAC IS ENROUTE TO TOKYO AND SHORTLY AFTER HIS RETURN GISCARD IS LEAVING FOR GABON AND THEN ON TO ZAIRE FOR VACATION AND BIG GAME HUNTING. WE THEREFORE SEE LITTLE LIKELIHOOD OF ANY PRESIDENTIAL ACTION ON CHIRAC'S ALLEGED RESIGNATION BEFORE GISCARD'S RETURN AUGUST 22, IF THEN.

4. OUR SOURCE HAS REPORTED RELIABLY IN THE PAST. ON THE OTHER HAND, WE WOULD CAUTION THAT WE HAVE NO INDEPENDENT CONFIRMATION OF HIS STORY, AND INDEED THE CANARD'S ITEM MAY WELL BE PART OF THE SAME RUMOR

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PAGE 01 PARIS 21978 02 OF 02 281911Z

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MILL WHICH SO OFTEN FEEDS ON ITSELF DURING THE OTHERWISE SLOW SUMMER MONTHS. WE WOULD NOT BE SURPRISED IF THESE LATEST RUMORS WERE BUT THE LATEST MANIFESTATION OF ON-GOING SPECULATION ABOUT CHIRAC AND IF HE WERE IN FACT TO REMAIN IN OFFICE THROUGH THE MARCH 1977 MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS.

5. GISCARD CONTINUES TO NEED A PRIME MINISTER WHO CAN DELIVER THE UDR VOTES, AS CHIRAC HAS DONE ON THE LAST FEW IMPORTANT ISSUES IN PARLIAMENT. IN ADDITION, THERE DOES NOT SEEM TO BE ANY OTHER UDR FIGURE WITH THE SAME STANDING IN THE PARTY AND NATIONALLY AS CHIRAC. OTHER NAMES HAVE BEEN MENTIONED, SUCH AS MINISTER OF FOREIGN TRADE RAYMOND BARRE, MINISTER OF EQUIPMENT GALLEY AND UDR OLD GUARD DEPUTY OLIVIER GUICHARD. GUICHARD HAS REPORTEDLY TURNED DOWN ANY CONSIDERATION FOR PERSONAL REASONS AND THE OTHERS, WHILE VERY CAPABLE MEN, WOULD NOT NECESSARILY BE AN IMPROVEMENT OVER CHIRAC. APPOINTING A NEW PRIME MINISTER FROM THE CENTER, THE RI OR A "NON-POLITICAL" FIGURE WOULD POSE THE MAJORITY WITH A HOST OF NEW INTERNAL PROBLEMS, PARTICULARLY FROM UDR RANKS.

6. WE THEREFORE THINK THE CONVENTIONAL WISDOM WOULD REQUIRE GISCARD TO STICK WITH HIS PRESENT MAJORITY LEADERSHIP (THOUGH ALLOWING FOR CHANGES AMONG CERTAIN
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PAGE 02 PARIS 21978 02 OF 02 281911Z

OTHER MEMBERS OF THE CABINET), WHICH REFLECTS FAIRLY ACCURATELY THE PARTY STRENGTHS OF THE MAJORITY PARTIES IN THE ASSEMBLY. IN THIS WAY, HE WILL BE ABLE TO PRESENT A UNIFIED IMAGE OF THE MAJORITY TO THE PUBLIC IN PREPARING FOR THE MUNICIPALS EIGHT MONTHS AWAY.

7. WE WILL ATTEMPT TO GATHER MORE INFORMATION ON THESE RUMORS AND FOLLOW UP IN A SEPARATE CABLE.
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